CHURCH HISTORY

Chapter 42 – The Church Experience a Great Awakening

1.The Great Awakening

a. In the early part of the eighteenth century religious life in America was at low ebb. The Puritans who had founded the New England colonies were men and women of a deep religious life and strong religious convictions; their grandchildren had lost nearly all religious fervor

b. Then a tremendous change came over the religious life of the colonies. It has become known as the Great Awakening. A series of religious revivals took place in various colonies. The Great Awakening in America and the Methodist movement in England occurred at the same time

2.Frelinghuysen, Tennent, and Edwards

a.Theodore J. Frelinghuysen, who in the Netherlands had been under German Pietistic influence, arrived in America in 1720 to become the pastor of some Dutch Reformed churches on the frontier in New Jersey, in the valley of the Raritan River. Frelinghuysen was a preacher of outstanding ability. In his sermons he put all the emphasis on the need of conversion, and his fervent preaching soon bore fruit. Many new members were added to his church. Other churches heard about the remarkable changes brought about by his preaching and requested him to preach to them. In this way the revival spread beyond the valley of the Raritan.

b.William Tennent was the minister of a Presbyterian church in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania. He had four sons: Gilbert, William Jr., John, and Charles. The oldest son, Gilbert, had already been educated by his father for the ministry, when William Tennent built in a corner of his large yard a log cabin to be used as a schoolhouse. In this school, which was nicknamed the "Log College," the Reverend W. Tennent trained his three younger sons and in course of time fifteen other young men for the ministry

3.George White field

a.Wherever he preached huge crowds came to hear him. Sometimes he spoke to as many as twenty thousand people. Gifted with marvelous eloquence, he was the greatest preacher of the eighteenth century and one of the greatest of all time. Through his preaching thousands were converted, and the spiritual life of many other thousands was quickened.

4.The Aftermath

a.In time the interest in spiritual things began to grow less, and the revival called the Great Awakening burned itself out. As early as the years 1744 to 1748 Jonathan Edwards' church in Northampton, according to his own statement, was utterly dead. In those years not a single conversion took place

b.As the revival faded away certain dis-agreements arose

c.The Great Awakening also brought about the development of the New England theology, which in the end led to a great weakening of historic Calvinism among the Congregationalists, the Reformed, and the Presbyterians

d.At the same time a liberal tendency began to show itself, especially in the churches of Boston and vicinity, which in the early nineteenth century resulted in the formation of Unitarian churches

e.The Great Awakening powerfully fostered the spirit of revivalism, which has been one of the outstanding features of the life of the Church in America